

February 17, 2011

Here is an excerpt from today's New York Times where columnist Gail Collins writes on our efforts to secure \$830 million in federal aid for Texas schools.

New York Times, Gail Collins  
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This month, The Houston Chronicle published an opinion piece by the former first lady titled "We Can't Afford to Cut Education," in which Mrs. Bush pointed out that students in Texas currently rank 47th in the nation in literacy, 49th in verbal SAT scores and 46th in math scores.

"In light of these statistics, can we afford to cut the number of teachers, increase class sizes, eliminate scholarships for underprivileged students and close several community colleges?" she asked.

You'd think there'd be an obvious answer. But the Texas State Legislature is looking to cut about \$4.8 billion over the next two years from the schools. Budgets are tight everywhere, but Perry, the state's governor, and his supporters made things much worse by reducing school property taxes by a third in 2006 under the theory that a higher cigarette tax and a new business franchise tax would make up the difference. Which they didn't.

"In Austin, I've got half-a-dozen or more schools on a list to be closed — one of which I presented a federal blue-ribbon award to for excellence," said Representative Lloyd Doggett. "And several hundred school personnel on the list for possible terminations."

So the first choice is what to do. You may not be surprised to hear that Governor Perry has rejected new taxes. He's also currently refusing \$830 million in federal aid to education because the Democratic members of Congress from Texas — ticked off because Perry used \$3.2 billion in stimulus dollars for schools to plug other holes in his budget — put in special language

requiring that this time Texas actually use the money for the kids.

"If I have to cast very tough votes, criticized by every Republican as too much federal spending, at least it ought to go to the purpose we voted for it," said Doggett.

Nobody wants to see underperforming, overcrowded schools being deprived of more resources anywhere. But when it happens in Texas, it's a national crisis.